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ABSTRACT

Recent research in agenda setting, dealing with the ways people perceive campaign issues dependent upon their coverage by the media has left unanswered the question of how context variables such as political framing--the context within which the media present a particular issue-affect the agenda setting process. A study was conducted to test the hypothesis that voters have agendas similar to media agendas of issues that receive a campaign frame or context when compared to agendas not receiving such a frame. Two sets of data were collected during the 1980 United States presidential campaign: media data from television newscasts and the local daily newspaper were analyzed and reduced to 12 categories, and audience agendas were solicited from 356 residents of central Illinois through telephone interviews. Demographic and interest variables included age, sex, and education. Results did show a strong correlation between audience and media agendas for issues receiving a campaign frame. In all conditions, television was most successful in setting audience agendas. Predictions for newspaper campaign agendas were supported for education, but not age. Women were more affected than men both by television and by newspapers. Post hoc analyses also produced correlations between media use and agenda setting, with television strongest late in the campaign. (JL)

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POLITICAL FRAMING AND AGENDA SETTING IN THE 1980 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

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POLITICAL FRAMING AND AGENDA SETTING
IN THE 1980 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

The problem with much of the research on how the media affect political cognitions is the failure to consider what Lang and Lang (1959) call the "second hand reality" of the campaign. Similar to Swanson's (1977) "melodramatic scenario", the second hand reality of the campaign is the aura attached to the processes primarily designed to reinforce political supporters and persuade the undecideds to vote for selected candidates. This aura is most prevalent in presidential campaigns. The mystique of presidential cmapaigns is evidenced by their ability to attract journalists from around the country and to monopolize evening, network newscasts. Political research, with the exception of quasi-studies resulting in popular books by journalists such as The Selling of the President 1968 (McGinnis, 1969), has yet to determine how this aura affects the formation of political cognitions or how voters prioritize issues relevant to campaigns.

Two reasons may be responsible for this failure to consider campaign aura. First and most obvious, is that such research is difficult to conduct. How does one define political aura to facilitate the measurement of relevant variables? Also, in what time frame should such a study be conducted? Such questions abound, and are actually relevant not only to the study of aura, but also to the study of all political behavior. A second reason for the failure to consider the political aura and its effects on political cognitions is that the media present it in the context of campaign activity. Many early studies have found that when the mass media, especially network television news, attempt to cover political campaigns, they devote most of their time to where the candidates are on a given day, but not

to what they say about the issues (Patterson & McClure, 1976; Williams & Semlak, 1978).[1] The viewer has little notion of what are the candidates' positions on issues presented during segments of the newscast that are not part of continuing series on the campaign that typify network coverage of presidential campaigns. Further, voters do not even know if some of the issues they read in the newspaper and see on television are even relevant to the campaign.

Recent research in the area of agenda setting, or how people prioritize campaign issues dependent on media coverage of them, may provide some preliminary answers or solutions to the two preceding problems. First, some studies have attempted to consider how the media communicate the political aura. Content studies such as the ones conducted by Hofstetter (1976) and Frank (1973) found that various visual presentation techniques, such as placement of issues and the use of film, are used by the television networks to present information about political campaigns. Although these studies did not find any biases toward either candidate in the 1972 presidential campaign, they did note some differences in how these visual techniques were used to cover Nixon and McGovern. However, they did not study the impact these visual techniques had on how the voters perceived the candidates, either in terms of issues or images. One study that did attempt to measure this impact on issues, or the agenda setting effect, was conducted by Williams and Semlak (1978b) They did uncover some differential agenda setting effects based on visual and story placement variables identified by both Hofstetter and Frank. However, these findings were not related to political aura. They did not consider the campaign context of the media agendas as presented in the 1976 presidential campaign.

Unfortunately, the problem with the Williams and Semlak (1978b) study and most of the other agenda setting studies conducted to date, is that the question of how the communication of political aura by the media affects political cognitions can not be answered. The reason is that they typically suffer from methodological

ecology. The common practice is to treat the story or news item as the unit of analysis, despite the fact that the purpose of these studies is not to measure the impact of the various media on what is known about all the issues of the day, but to determine how voters prioritize issues relevant to the specific campaign (cf. Williams & Semlak, 1978a). In the traditional agenda setting study, all issues presented by the media during the campaign are then rank ordered depending on the time or column inches devoted to each category of issues. This rank order and the rank order of campaign issues identified by the voters are then correlated to determine the agenda setting effect of the media. Recent studies have used this basic design with cross-lagged correlations and longitudinal methods to determine the causal effects the media have on voter agendas of campaign issues (Weaver, Graber, McCombs, & Eyal, 1981). The problem with this strategy is that researchers have failed to consider a basic communication variable--context. Studies abound that indicate the importance of context when considering the impact of selected variables on specific audiences. For example, one series of studies found that context was not accurately considered in the developement of "All in the Family." The intention of the series was to humorously depict racial bigotry to hopefully change stereotypes of selected television viewers. The impact, however, was to reinforce these attitudes through the principal character, Archie Bunker (Surlin & Tate, 1976).

Applying context to the communication of issues relevant to political campaigns is similar to what Dennis and Baran (1981) call framing. Issues presented, especially on network television newscasts, all have some type of frame that has been developed over time and has resulted from the repeated coverage of such issues. For example, conflicts in the middle east have been put into a frame of Israeli-Arab relations. The recent death of Anwar Sadat is a good example. Not only was his assassination a topic of many news accounts, but also the impact his death would have on peace treaties with Israel. Viewers of television news expect, at least subconsciously,

to have these frames when viewing stories about important issues of the day. It allows the viewer to organize the newscast and the issues in a meaningful way. Hopefully, it also precludes feelings of narcotization which were popular grist for the news critics in years past.

Framing also applies to the communication of campaign issues. All three television network news programs had a series on the 1980 presidential campaign. In these series, the networks not only presented the day's campaign activities of the various candidates, but also their positions on some relevant issues. Also, other stories contained in the typical newscast also received a political frame through interviews with candidates concerning these issues and how they have impacted their campaigns. Essentially, the networks lined some issues contained in their newscasts to the presidential campaign and failed to link other issues. What impact does this linkage, or political framing, have on the development of political cognitions?

A preliminary answer to this question was found in a study conducted by Williams, Shapiro, Cutbirth and Semlak (1981). They divided the media agendas of the three television network newscasts and the local, daily newspaper into two agendas: one consisting of stories with a campaign link or frame and the other without such a link. The media agenda having the most impact was the one with the campaign link. Based on these results, they suggested that the actual agenda setting effect of the media occurs when they give issues a political frame; context is crucial to the study of agenda setting during political campaigns. The problem with this study, however, was that it did not consider the various conditions contingent to the agenda setting effect identified in earlier studies. The purpose of this study was to consider such variables and how political framing affects their role in the agenda setting process during the 1980 presidential campaign.

Some of the categories of contingent conditions considered in past agenda setting studies included: demographics, media use, political activity and interest. The demographic variables popular in these studies were: age, sex and education. A comprehensive study of agenda setting in the 1976 presidential campaign, conducted by Weaver, et. al. (1981) found that all three of these variables to be important. Considering age, they found that older voters tended to have more facts of political knowledge about a few issues, but younger voters were more attentive to the news and therefore exposed to more issues. Naturally, these media use ahd political knowledge differences were manifested in different perceptions of issues relevant to the campaign. However, how they intervened in the agenda setting process was not discussed. An earlier study, by McLeod, Becker and Byrnes (1974) found that newspapers had more of an agenda setting effect on older readers.

A second demographic variable, sex, is also important in the agenda setting process. Gans (1979) suggests that news viewing behaviors differ between men and women. Weaver, et. al. (1981) show how this difference relates to the formation of perceptions of presidential campaign issues. For example, males scored higher on political knowledge, defined as knowing candidates' stands on issues, and had different agendas than females. However, some of these differences were fairly minor. Greater differences have been found when education was considered. A study conducted by Quarles (1979) found that education was a strong predictor of political knowledge. Weaver, et. al. (1981) suggest that education provides the necessary precondition to wanting political information early in the campaign which then leads to more learning of issues and stands on issues. The result is that people who are more educated have a different perception of important issues than do those with less education merely because they know more issues and know more about them. However, the exact role sex and education play in the

agenda setting process is unclear. Hypothetically, people that know the most about political issues were, at least at one time, most dependent on the media for information. Therefore, they should be most affected by the media agendas. If this logic is accurate, then males should be most affected by campaign information presented by the media. Also, the more educated person should have agendas of campaign issues most similar to those of the media during political campaigns.

The role education plays in the agenda setting process is more complex than just providing the stimulus for learning about political issues. Weaver's research on the need for information, although not empirically linked to education in all instances, suggests that education is one necessary precondition to the need for information. This need has been linked to agenda setting. Defined as the need for orientation (a combination of uncertainty, interest and effort), high needs lead to increased use of the media which then lead to increased agenda setting effects (Weaver, 1977). Combining these studies with those delineating the effects of education noted above suggests that this variable is an important contingent condition to the study of agenda setting.

Considering media use, Weaver, et. al. (1981) divided their sample into three groups: high newspaper/low television use, high newspaper use/low television use and high television/high newspaper use. They found that television at its greatest agenda setting impact for the high television/low newspaper group. Becker and Whitney (1980) found that media effects are greatest for audiences highly dependent on either television or newspaper to the exclusion of the other. Building from these studies, that audiences of only one source of news is more affected by that source, is that audiences that use the media for information about political campaigns should be more affected by these media than audiences who use the media for other purposes such as companionship. Sepcifically, if a voter watches the news to assist in making political decisions, information communicated by stories

useful for this purpose should have more impact on personal agendas than if the same person was watching for entertainment or just general information. Such an argument is the basis for the uses and gratifications approach to the study of the media. However, this process is certainly more complex than just suggested. For, if a voter is to be affected by these politically oriented messages, content that is communicated should also be remembered. Therefore, television news audiences, watching for political information should have an information need gratified and should remember at least one story related to this gratification. The same logic can be applied to newspaper readers; they should be gratified and remember at least one story related to this gratification.

The final category of variables relevant to the study of agenda setting consists of political activity and interest. Considering activity first, Williams and Semlak (1978a), in a study of the 1976 presidential campaign, found that political involvement was an important intervening variable in the agenda setting process. Political activity may take many forms ranging from actually working for a candidate, as defined by Williams and Semlak, or discussing political issues. Such discussions may occur at professional meetings or civic clubs or groups. Regardless, the person must have an environment conducive to such discussions. Therefore, activity, in a very general sense, probably consists of not only the number of political discussions a person has, but also the opportunity to discuss them Belonging to clubs, etc. provides such an environment. Relating this logic to agenda setting, because activity, as defined above, probably reinforces perceptions of issue importance determined by watching or reading the news, people most active should also have agendas most similar to those presented by the media. People low in activity will not have their agendas (learned from the media) reinforced and will not have their agendas set by the media for campaign issues.

Considering interest as a condition contingent to agenda setting, most studies

define it as one item measuring responses on a Likert-type scale. However, interest in a presidential campaign should be intrinsically linked to a general interest in national affairs and issues related to the campaign. Respondents most interest in a campaign should be more attuned to the media for information and therefore be more affected by the media agendas of campaign issues. Support for this prediction can be found in the need for orientation research discussed above.

The role contingent conditions plays in agenda setting is fairly clear: the media set agendas only in specific situations. What is not clear from past studies is how these conditions interact with content variables such as political framing in the agenda setting process. If the predicted logic is supported, voters most susceptible to the media agenda (socially active, interested, more educated, etc.) should have agendas most similar to media agendas of issues which receive a campaign frame or context when compared to agendas not receiving such a frame.

METHODOLOGY

Two data sets were collected in this study. The first data set consisted of the media agenda presented during the 1980 presidential campaign by the evening network television newscasts and the local daily newspaper. The audience agenda was the second data set.

Media Agendas

The data were collected between September 15 (the beginning of the media campaign) and October 31, 1980. The network agenda was determined by coding portions of stories into one of 136 content categories with the content segment functioning as the unit of analysis. A story, as defined by the networks, could be separated into more than one mutually exclusive and exhaustive category dependent on the number of issues each story contained. For example, a story on Arab-Israeli relations and

how they impacted oil imports of the United States would be coded as a middle east category and as an energy issue. The 136 issues were then collapsed into twelve categories. The reliability of coding was assured by consensus between two coders.

The television agenda was then computed by summing the total number of seconds of each content segment in each of the twelve categories. Rank ordering was based on the total time devoted to each category. The result was the aggregate television agenda. Networks were not considered separately because of the very high correlations between their agendas.

The newspaper agenda was constructed based on determining the total number of column inches devoted to each issue contained in each of the twelve issue categories. Column inches, based on a six column format, were recorded for each segment and summed to determine the overal ranks. The result was the aggregate newspaper agenda.

Campaign framing was defined as all issues presented by the television networks and the newspaper that were directly, and overtly linked to either Ronald Reagan or Jimmy Carter. These stories were usually found in the campaign series. However, an occasional story with direct campaign links were found. These issues were identified, those with campaign frames and were separated from the aggregate newspaper and television agendas. The result was the construction of two agendas each for both television and newspaper. The campaign agenda consisted of stories with campaign links and the non-campaign agendas consisted of all other stories presented by the media during the time of this study.

Audience Agenda

The audience agenda was constructed from answers to questions solicited in telephone interviews. A list of telephone numbers was randomly generated and called by trained interviewers. In total, 482 residents in central Illinois were contacted with 356 actually interviewed. The adjusted completion ratio (completions divided by completions plus refusals) was 74%.

The audience agenda was determined by answers to this question:

> When talking to others, what is the most important presidential campaign issue?

The total number of respondents naming issues in one of the twelve issue categories was recorded. Issues in the audience agenda were ranked based on this total.

Contingent Conditions

The demographic and interest variables considered in this study were identified as antecedent to the agenda setting process. Age, sex and education were measured on Likert-type scales as in most traditional mass media studies. Using Weaver, et. al. (1981) as a guideline, age and education were dichotomized. The sample was divided by age into: (1) forty years or over or (2) under forty years of age. Education was divided based on college experience into: (1) no college experience or (2) at least some college experience.

Interest was defined by answers to three questions measuring interest in national affairs, the 1980 presidential campaign and in the issue elicited from the audience agenda question presented above. The responses to these three items ranged from very interested to very uninterested on a five point scale. Responses were summed forming the Interest Index. The distribution of responses on this index were divided into thirds with the top third identified as very interested and the bottom third labelled not very interested.

The three intervening variables considered in this study involved measures of media use. The first measure, relating to general use of the media for news, consisted of items measuring the amount of time spent: watching network and local television news (two items), listening to radio news and reading the newspaper. Scroes ranged from four (no use) to twenty-four (heavy use). The sample

was then divided into thirds for comparisons to the media agendas.

The second intervening variable was designed as a more specific measure of media use. It consisted of the following conditions: recall of a story from the previous evening, gratifications from television and newspaper for political information, use of the medium for information, source of medium for making political decisions, source of information for opinions about presidential candidates, and evaluations concerning which medium treats perceived important campaign issues most fairly. Two indexes were constructed, one each for television and newspaper audiences. The specific items included in these two indexes were:

> believed newspapers/television treated their issue most fairly (1),
>
> used the newspaper/television as a source of information when making their voting decision (1),
>
> go to the newspaper/television for information about their preferred campaign issue (1),
>
> believed newspapers/television have the most influence on opinions of the candidates (1), and
>
> were gratified by newspaper/television coverage of the presidential campaign (4-12).

The values in parentheses were assigned to a respondent if they answered either television or newspaper to these items. Therefore, if a person thought newspapers best answered these questions, they received a value of four (4) plus the score from the gratifications measure. This measure consisted of four items constructed by Becker (1979) to measure the information function of the media during political campaigns. Respondents were asked to answer these items as they applied to television, then to newspapers. Responses were coded on a three point Likert-type scale. The values, ranging from four (4) to twelve (12) were added to the values obtained from summing scores of the preceding four items presented above for both newspaper and television. The resulting indexes were labelled: Television Use and Newspaper Use. They were divided into thirds for the analysis.

The third intervening variable, social activity, was a summed index consisting of the following conditions: opinion leadership, participation in political discussions, membership in professional organizations and civic clubs. The range of values for this scale was from three (not socially active) to eighteen (very socially active). These sums resulted from the following conditions:

frequently asked opinions about presidential campaign issues (1),
number of political discussions (1-5),
number of civic clubs (1-6), and
number of professional organizations (1-6)

The summed value of these items was called the Social Activity Index. The distribution of responses on this index was divided into thirds with the top third being very active and the bottom third not being very active.

RESULTS

The content analysis of the media considered in this study resulted in a twelve category agenda. The categories comprising this agenda and selected examples of their respective issues were:

1. integrity in government - ABSCAM, Billy Carter, Richard Nixon;
2. nuclear energy - power plants, energy shortages;
3. social problems - abortion, birth control, crime;
4. foreign policy - Afghanistan, detente, El Salvadore;
5. campaign - non-issues,
6. debates - between Reagan, Carter and Andersen;
7. social rights - bussing, capital punishment, civil rights;
8. defense - arms limitations, military strenth, the draft;
9. inflation - gold prices, government spending, stock market;
10. jobs - industry issues and unemployment;

11. Iran hostages - stories about their release; and

12. Iran war - with Iraq.

These categories were then used to construct the audience agenda. This procedure was used because the logic of the agenda setting process suggests that the media agenda leads to formation of the audience agenda; the time order is explicit. The aggregate, non-campaign and campaign media agendas and the audience agenda can be found in Table 1.

Table 1 About Here

The most important issue in the aggregate agenda for both television and the newspaper was the Iran hostage situation. Issues not receiving much attention included: nuclear energy and foreign policy. The other issues received fairly equal treatment. The non-campaign and aggregate media agendas were very similar, with the Iran hostages receiving much more attention by both television and newspaper than the other issues in the non-campaign agendas. The strength of the similarities between the television and newspaper agendas are indicated by the Spearman Rho rank order correlations: aggregate agendas (television/newspaper)=.65, non-campaign agendas (television/newspaper)=.72. Both of these correlations were statistically significant. The campaign media agendas were also very similar to one another, but not to their respective aggregate and non-campaign agendas. Campaign agendas emphasized social rights, inflation, jobs and other issues. The correlation between newspaper and television campaign agendas was .71. However the lack of similarity between campaign agendas and their respective non-campaign agendas were indicated by the very low correlations: newspaper (campaign/non-campaign agendas)=.04, television (campaign/non-campaign agendas)=.03.[2]

The audience agenda reveals some consensus among respondents in this survey

regarding the perceived importance of campaign issues. The most important issue was inflation, followed by defense, jobs and Iran. The similar empahses of the media campaign and ausience agendas are reflected in the correlations, especially when compared to the aggregate and non-campaign media agendas. The audience/media correlations were: television/aggregate = .03, television/non-campaign= .03, television/campaign= .65, newspaper/aggregate= -.15, newspaper/non-campaign= .12, newspaper/campaign= .31. The two correlations between the media campaign and audience agendas were statistically significant.

Correlations between the television and newspaper non-campaign and campaign agendas with the various agendas etermined by the contingent conditions described earlier can be found in Table 2. Considering the demographic variables in terms of the non-campaign agenda, television had its greatest agenda setting influence on: the less educated (no college experience), females and people over forty years of age. Newspaper, non-campaign influence was greatest for females and people with less education. However, none of the correlations obtained for the newspaper agendas were statistically significant.[3] These trends were not evident for the campaign agendas presented by the media. For television (campaign agenda), the greatest similarities between the media and the audience agendas were found for: people under forty and females. The newspaper agenda was most similar to females and the more educated respondents. None of the correlations between audience and newspaper campaign agendas were statistically significant.

The three indexes pertaining to use of the mass media accentuated the agenda setting powers of television compared to newspapers revealed by the preceding analysis. When considering the non-campaign media agendas, television and audience agendas were most similar for respondents scoring high on all three indexes. However,

some of these differences, especially for the Television Use Index, were fairly small. Newspapers were most effective in setting agendas for the same respondents, but not to the degree attributable to television. Again, some of the differences between correlations were small for newspapers as those considered in the analysis of television's influence on audience agendas.[4]

Similar results were not found when the media campaign agendas were considered. Television's impact was greatest for respondents scoring low on media use and television use indexes and high on the Newspaper Use Index. Newspaper campaign agendas were most similar to respondents low on media and television use indexes and high on the Newspaper Use Index. Differences betwen those high and low on the Television Use Index were the smallest of these three sets of correlations.

The final two indexes measured interest and social activity. The television, non-campaign agenda was most effective in setting agendas for respondents with little interest or activity. The newspaper, non-campaign agenda had the most impact on those low in interest, but high in activity. Television and the newspaper set agendas for people high both in interest and activity when the campaign issues were considered.

Table 2 About Here

DISCUSSION

A traditional study of the agenda setting process, given the data of this study, would conclude that the media had little impact on the formation of political cognitions during the 1980 presidential campaign. This conclusion would be based on the many near zero correlations displayed in Table 2 for the non-campaign agendas.

However, a much different conclusion would be reached if the campaign agenda is considered. In every comparison of correlations in Table 2, the relationship between audience and media agendas is strongest for issues receiving a campaign frame(campaign agenda).

The reasons for the differential effects of the campaign and non-campaign agendas are obvious from the data presented in Table 1. The most pervasive non-campaign agenda issue was the Iran war with Iraq. Over one quarter of the non-campaign agenda was devoted to this issue. Conversely, very few of these news items received a campaign linkage which is also evident in Table 1; only five percent of the television campaign agenda and none of the newspaper stories discussed the war in terms of the presidential campaign. The newspaper ignored the hostage situation and the war as campaign issues, suggesting a reason for its minimal agenda setting effect compared to television. Obviously, the audience perceived the hostage situation as a fairly important issue after inflation. Respondents perceiving these issues as important were probably affected by television and not the newspaper campaign agenda.

The issues that were important in the media and for the audience involved economic and defense concerns (for the campaign agenda). In fact, solutions to problems involving the economy and defense were among the most hotly contested issues in the campaign and provided the greatest differences between Carter and Reagan. The emphasis placed on these issues and the perceptions of their importance by the electorate explains the very high correlations deiplayed in Table 2 for the media campaign agendas. However, there are two plausable explanations for these findings. One explanation argues that the media cover the candidates emphasizing defense and economic issues. This coverage then leads to perceptions of the importance of these issues by the electorate. This first explanation supports the agenda setting hypothesis.

A second plausable explanation suggests that the electorate's concern with

defense and economic issues leads to conscientious efforts by the candidates to discuss them in their many campaign appearances. Since the media campaign agenda consists primarily of coverage of these appearances, their campaign agendas are monopolized by economic and defense issues. This explanation suggests that the electorate set the media campaign agenda. Since speeches and stands on issues are based, for the most part on responses from people comprising the audiences for television and newspaper, this argument is also an acceptable explanation for the general results of this study. Only when causal relationships between media and audience agendas are considered do we find support for the agenda setting hypothesis. Although beyond the scope of the data in this study, previous research reported by Shaw and McCombs (1977) and Weaver, et. al. (1981) have used cross-lagged correlational statistics to support the agenda setting hypothesis. Assuming that trends in media influence in shaping political cognitions uncovered in studies of the 1972 and 1976 presidential campaigns are relevant to the 1980 contest, the media have had a tremendous agenda setting impact when the campaign agendas are considered. This impact is especially evident when the correlations obtained between the campaign and audience agendas are compared to those of earlier studies. Past research has found practical significance in obtained correlations, but few have found the number of statistically significant relationships of the present study.

The conclusion from these results is that the media are very influential only when they present information in its proper context, i.e., they provide framing for the issues. Support for this conclusion can be found in the study of agenda setting in off-election years conducted by Williams and Larsen (1977). The relationships between media and audience agendas in this study were fairly large, many being statistically significant. However, when Williams and Semlak (1978a) studied the same audience, one year later, these relationships were much weaker. The

differences in agenda setting effects can be attributed to environment. In the Williams and Semlak study, there were competing frames; the presidential campaign pervaded the media agenda. Conversely, no elections competed for frames usually offered by the media when Williams and Larsen conducted their study. For example, during presidential campaigns, the media can use their traditional frames or political frames when discussing economic issues, foreign policy, etc. The result is confusion for the electorate and methodological ecology problems for the researcher. The electorate, as found in this study, seems only to consider issues as imporant to the campaign when given the campaign frame. So, when people are asked their most important campaign issue, as in most agenda setting studies, they respond with the issues given a campaign frame by the media. Then, comparisons of these agendas to the aggregate media agendas by the researchers produces ecology problems. Campaign agendas are compared to aggregate media agendas which then leads to the suppressing the true agenda setting influences operating during the campaign. This suppression effect is obvious in the data reported in the present study.

Considering campaign and non-campaign agendas separately does not give much insight into how the various contingent conditions or audience variables affect the agenda setting process. Television news is often found to have the greatest impact on the less educated, undecided voter late in the campaign, especially when voting decisions are considered. However, this general finding clearly does not apply to agenda setting during the time period of this study. The television campaign agenda was more influential for the younger audiences, but not the less educated. No real differences were found for education. In terms of the effects of the newspaper campaign agenda, hypothesized effects based on education, but not age were supported. The more educated respondent was most affected by the newspaper agenda when compared to the less educated person. An examination of how age and education interact to affect agenda setting may explain these results. Perhaps

the older, more educated person is more affected by newspapers and the younger less educated respondents by television.

A post hoc analysis of this possible interaction of age and education was conducted with the results appearing in Table 3. In all conditions, television was most successful in setting audience agendas. Also, in all but one condition, the agendas of the more educated respondent was most similar to the newspaper and television campaign agenda than people with less education. However, the less educated, younger respondent was most affected by television when compared to people with some education. In fact, this correlation is the highest appearing in Table 3. These findings suggest two conclusions. First, the younger, less educated person seems to be the most susceptable audience for agenda setting by the media. Given that these agendas were measured just prior to election day, this finding is not surprising given the results of past research. The uneducated voter tends to make voting decisions very late in a campaign and knows the least about the issues. Perhaps, in a last minute quest for some information, this voter frantically searches for the most accessible mass medium that requires the least effort--television. A second conclusion based on Table 3 is the television, late in the campaign, does have an agenda setting effect. Research conducted in time periods early in presidential campaigns has found newspapers best able to set audience agendas. Later in the campaign, the relative agenda setting impact of newspapers and television lessens dramatically. This conclusion has been supported by many time studies (cf. Weaver, et. al., 1981). This trend may be explained by the need many voters have for information as election day approaches. As for the less educated voter discussed above, most people, at least those with little issue information, consult sources of information requiring the least effort, i.e., television. The traditional variables discriminating between the relative agenda setting impacts of television and newspaper, age and education, are irrelevant during this time period.

Sex, the final demographic variable considered in this study revealed that the most agenda setting impact for both newspaper and television was for females. As suggested earlier, these differences may be explainable by different media use habits for men and women. A post hoc analysis failed to support this hypothesis; few differences were found for network television viewing or newspaper reading. A more logical explanation may be found in the Weaver, et. al. (1981) study. Their results revealed that men tended to know more about the candidates' stands on issues than females. The difference in political knowledge, producing a decrease in uncertainty, may lessen use of the media for political information. The result then is that males have slightly less dependency on the media for political information and therefore are less affected by the media agenda presented latter in the campaign. If true, then studies of agenda setting conducted earlier in the campaign process should find equal amounts of agenda setting for males and females.

The final measures (indexes) considered in this study were media use behaviors, campaign interest and social activity. In terms of the three media use indexes, only the Newspaper Use Index conformed to predictions offered above. Respondents high in newspaper use were more affected by the newspaper campaign agenda than those low on the index. Respondents low on the Media Use and Television Use indexes had agendas more similar to those presented both by television and the newspaper. These findings could be explained by studies of media effects and dependencies conducted by Becker and Whitney. They found that respondents exclusively dependent one one medium to most affected by that medium. Applying this finding to the present study, the Newspaper Use and Television Use indexes should be considered only as they apply to people high in one and low in the other. A post hoc analysis of this possible relationship was conducted. Correlations were computed between the television campaign agenda and the agenda of respondents high on television use and low on newspaper use. A second correlation was computed between the newspaper campaign agenda and people reporting high newspaper use and low television use. The correlations were:

.52 and .26, respectively. These findings support the conclusion that television has a much greater impact on personal agendas late in the campaign when providing a political frame.

The remaining indexes conformed to predicted relationships between social activity, interest and agenda setting. Respondents high on interest and high in activity had agendas most similar to the campaign agendas presented by both media. This finding shows the importance of considering political discussion and social activity as clusters of related behaviors rather than the less complex, single item measures popular in previous studies. Further, these results point to the importance of considering interpersonal communication in future agenda setting studies. If political discussions, as defined in this study, do reinforce perceptions of issue importance determined by using the media, then the specific role the media play in these discussions deserves more thorough investigation. For example, what impact does credibility of the communicator have on the ability of the media to set agendas. Also, what impact does communication apprehension of the audience member have on how political discussions or social activity reinforce the agenda setting effects of the media.

The final consideration in this study is the impact campaign aura has on the development of political cognitions. If one valid measure of aura is to consider the political framing of issues, then aura has a tremendous impact on the formation of cognitions. The results of this study point to the significance of considering aura and other media content variables in future agenda setting studies.

TABLE 1

AGGREGATE, CAMPAIGN AND NON-CAMPAIGN MEDIA AGENDAS AND THE AUDIENCE AGENDA

	Television			Newspaper			Audience
	Aggregate	Campaign	Non-Campaign	Aggregate	Campaign	Non-Campaign	
Integrity	10%	9%	10%	9%	14%	9%	1%
Nuclear Energy	2	1	2	2	0	2	0
Social Problems	11	9	11	11	7	11	4
Foreign Policy	4	1	5	6	2	6	4
Social Rights	8	16	6	14	39	12	4
Defense	9	16	7	7	8	7	12
Inflation	8	17	7	9	20	8	51
Jobs	9	13	9	4	10	4	11
Iran Hostages	12	13	12	14	0	15	10
Iran War	27	5	31	24	0	26	3
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

NOTE: Tied ranks in this table, with the exception of zero values, are due to rounding and do not represent actual ties.

TABLE 2

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN TELEVISION AND NEWSPAPER NON-CAMPAIGN AND CAMPAIGN AND THE AUDIENCE AGENDAS

Audience Variables	Television		Newspaper	
	Non-Campaign	Campaign	Non-Campaign	Campaign
Demographics				
Age				
under 40	-.03	.68*	-.04	.28
over 40	.24	.55	-.08	.28
Education				
Some College	-.06	.69*	-.13	.34
No College	.36	.63*	.11	.20
Sex				
Male	.09	.56*	-.14	.19
Female	.13	.86*	.16	.41
Interest Index				
High	-.12	.77*	-.15	.46
Low	.12	.69*	.17	.23
Media Use Index				
high	.40	.47	.03	.14
low	.02	.77*	.01	.37
TV Use Index				
High	.05	.63*	-.08	.30
Low	.02	.68*	-.18	.33
Newspaper Use Index				
High	.08	.74*	-.06	.33
Low	-.04	.61*	-.13	.26
Social Activity Index				
High	-.03	.74*	-.05	.35
Low	.08	.61*	-.18	.24

*$p \leq .05$

TABLE 3

RELATIVE AGENDA SETTING EFFECT OF TELEVISION
AND NEWSPAPERS DEPENDENT ON AGE AND EDUCATION

Audience Variable	Newspaper	Television
Under 40		
No College	.21	.76*
Some College	.28	.68*
Over 40		
No College	.33	.49
Some College	.42	.73*

* p .05
NOTE: Correlations were based on the campaign agendas presented by television and the newspaper.

NOTES

[1]Many reasons can be suttested for the failure of the media to cover issues when presenting information about the candidates. One may be that the candidates essentially say the same thing in their campaign sppeches around the country. To constantly repeat these speeches would be to add monotony to campaign coverage. A second reason may be that issues are essentially boring and broadcasters feel that coverage of campaign activites and not issues would add excitement to their programs. Regardless, activity is more pervasive in campaign coverage than are the issues (Tipton, Haney & Baseheart, 1975).

[2]These agendas did not include the campaign (non-issue) and debates categories. Exclusion of campaign activity stories from the media agenda is typical of most agenda setting studies (Weaver, et. al., 1981).

[3]Statistical significance is not the real issue in these comparisons. Few agenda setting studies achieve significance. Further, this test of meaningful results would generally be misleading because of the necessity to achieve very high correlations because agendas typically consist of such few ranks. In fact, these ranks represent a synthesis of many respondents and issues/stories presented in the media. The key is to look for trends in the data that lead to evaluations of practical significance.

[4]The same logic as applied above is relevant to testing for statistical differences between correlations. Some of the differences in Table 2 are over 30 points. This difference, while not significant statistically, certainly has practical significance.

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